



Coventry City Council

6

Public report

## **REPORT BACK ON CONFERENCE/SEMINAR**

**REPORT TO: Scrutiny Coordination Committee – 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2008**

**REPORT OF: Lord Mayor, Cllr Dave Batten**

**TITLE: Civic Visit to Volgograd, Russia on the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad**

**DATE: 31<sup>st</sup> January – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2008**

**VENUE: Volgograd, Russia**

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### **1 Recommendation**

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Coordination Committee is recommended to note the report on the Lord Mayor's recent civic visit to Volgograd, Russia and the outcomes of the visit.

### **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Battle of Stalingrad was a turning point during WWII, and from Coventry extending messages of friendship came the first ever twinning link in the world - Coventry & Stalingrad (now Volgograd) in 1944. This founded the worldwide twinning movement. The friendship was cemented as a result of both cities experiencing devastation during the Second World War.
- 2.2 At the time of the onslaught on the Russian city, women from Coventry sent messages of hope to the women of Stalingrad having experienced the Coventry Blitz just a few years earlier. The first message from 831 Coventry women were written onto a tablecloth and sent to the women of Stalingrad which said "From this city scarred and ravaged by the arch enemy of civilisation, our hearts go out to you, who now face slaughter and suffering even more fearful". The names and messages on the tablecloth were later embroidered by the women of Volgograd. Over the years this has become well-known between both cities as 'The Coventry Tablecloth'.
- 2.3 2008 marked the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory of Soviet people and military troops in the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943. The Lord Mayor, Councillor Dave Batten, received an invitation from Volgograd City Administration to attend and take part in a programme of commemorative events organised to mark this historic occasion.
- 2.4 John McGuigan, Director of City Development and Jane Barlow, Civic Business Manager accompanied the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress on the visit.

### 3 Objectives

- 3.1 Alongside the Mayor of Volgograd City Administration and Russian Federation Government officials, the Lord Mayor to represent the City of Coventry at a number of commemorative events dedicated to mark the 65th Anniversary of the Great Battle.
- 3.2 Many countries and other Russian cities were expected to be represented at the events. Through networking the Lord Mayor and the group to explore opportunities for Coventry.
- 3.3 Opportunity to discuss plans for the 65th anniversary of the twinning link in 2009.

### 4 Cost of attending

- 4.1 The costs to the Council for attending were as follows:

Flights and VISAs to Volgograd:	£2,091.49
City Council's Travel Insurance:	£ 65.34
Subsistence:	<u>£ 234.11</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,390.94</b>

- 4.2 Costs were split between 3 budgets: Lord Mayor's Hospitality Budget and the Lord Mayor's office twinning budget and City Development Directorate. The costs of accommodation and meals were funded by the City of Volgograd.
- 4.3 The costs for the Lady Mayoress were covered personally by the Lord Mayor.

### 5 Outcomes of the Visit Linked to Objectives

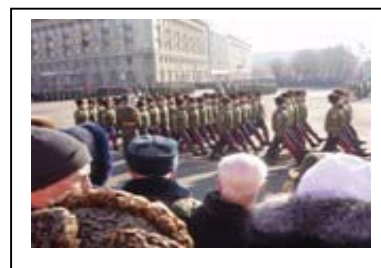
#### Objective 3.1

- 5.1 On the eve of the main commemorative occasion, a meeting for all international delegations was hosted by the Mayor and Chair of Volgograd City Administration. There were 18 cities from 13 countries represented, some of which were from Coventry's other twin/partner towns e.g. Hiroshima and Ostrava.



Vice Mayor of Ostrava, Ms Kareva Chair of Volgograd, Mayor Roman Grebennikov of Volgograd, Lord Mayor and Elena Vasilevskaya (interpreter)

- 5.2 The significant commemorative occasion, that marked Soviet troops defending the people of Stalingrad's future, was in the form of a military parade, with very high ranking officials and thousands of local people in attendance.



- 5.3 A visit to Mamayev Hill, the location of the Mother Russia monument, was the most poignant moment as the Lord Mayor laid a wreath on behalf of the citizens of Coventry at the Eternal Flame in the Military Glory Hall.



- 5.4 During a visit to the Panorama Museum, the Lord Mayor and Chair of Volgograd City Administration officially opened a commemorative exhibition dedicated to the Battle of Stalingrad. As part of this there was a televised interview which appeared on national and international TV.



### Objective 3.2

- 5.5 Coventry is a member of the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities, but has not actively participated for some time. The current President, Alf Marder from Connecticut, alongside the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General from Slovenia were all in attendance representing the Association at the commemorative events. To date the UK are unrepresented at the Association's next General Assembly being held in Sochi, from 13th-16th November 2008. The Association are keen for Coventry to be the lead city in the UK at this event which will require further consideration.



- 5.6 Alongside the Deputy Mayor of Hiroshima, Takeshi Komekami, the Lord Mayor marked the opening of a Sushi Restaurant in Volgograd.



- 5.7 A meeting took place with the former Vice-Mayor of Volgograd, Andrey Doronin on possible business links with Coventry. His information will be forwarded to The Chamber to explore economic opportunities as Russia's changes are significant, as they were with China 15 years ago.

### Objective 3.3

- 5.8 Another significant occasion whilst at the Panorama Museum was the launch of 'Stalingrad Tablecloth'. With reference to paragraph 2.2 above, in readiness for 2009 being the 65th anniversary of the twinning link between the two cities, Volgograd have started the process of preparing a Stalingrad Tablecloth to present to Coventry in 2009. The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress were the first to sign the tablecloth.



- 5.9 It was clearly established, by the launching the Stalingrad Tablecloth, that Volgograd are very keen to ensure the 65th anniversary of the twinning link, and founders of the international twinning movement, does not go unmarked in 2009. The visit attracted a lot of local, national and international media interest. Discussions will continue on possible inward and outward delegation visits during 2009.



## Additional Outcomes

5.10 Upon visiting a school for children aged 6-17, Lycuum No.5 School, a special performance was delivered by the pupils to mark the visit of the Lord Mayor. This included a presentation from one special pupil who had done a project on the Volgograd-Coventry Twinning Link. Opportunities will be explored with Children, Learning & Young People Directorate about establishing a link with a Coventry school.



5.11 Mr Hayashi, President of the International Youth Association from Hiroshima, was also in Volgograd. Previously, Coventry children have attended their Annual Conference and Mr Hayashi is keen for this to continue. Coventry are due to take part in an International Youth Forum Workshop in Hanover in August 2008, and C,L&YP are planning to put together a fully-costed plan to host the event in Coventry in 2010.

### List of background papers

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Papers open to public inspection

#### Description of paper:

Civic Visit to Volgograd File

#### Location

Room 36, Council House